Sweet William

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/42664728.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Additional Tags:	Fluff and Angst, Sickfic, Work In Progress, Not Beta Read, Orphanage, Alternate Universe - Orphanage, Hannibal takes care of Will Graham, Fire, Hyperventilation, Nightmares, Mention of Parent Death, No Underage Sex
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2022-10-27 Updated: 2022-11-01 Words: 2,848 Chapters: 2/?

Sweet William

by dinoleestuff

The Infirmary

Hannibal tries to make an effort to visit the orphanage at least twice a year. Yet with his life full of therapy patients, dinner parties, opera houses and suit measurements, it is often pushed to the back of his mind. Some would consider his avoidance strange; Hannibal has donated a considerable for the construction of the orphanage and makes yearly donations. A lesser man would probably go there often just to boast. But most of his acquaintances do not know much about his past. They think of his philanthropic acts as a hobby of a rich man, no more no less.

They do not know that Hannibal makes sure that the children are in good hands, for he does not wish his childhood on anyone. They are unaware of the fact that Hannibal still feels the lingering dread when he enters its halls, that he has to remind himself that he is in Baltimore, that he is no longer a child but a fully grown man, that he is no longer *vulnerable.*

It is on one of his belated visits to the orphanage that he comes across Will. Hannibal is accompanied by the director as he walks around the halls, peering into rooms where children are learning and inspecting the quality of the kitchen where caregivers are preparing dinner. Children who barely come up to his waist walk around him, meek and quiet. Hannibal made sure that all children are raised with a gentle but firm hand to have proper manners; but he knows that the children are quiet not out of politeness but out of fear. He wants to tell them that he would not hurt them, but he also knows that they would be too smart to believe a strange adult. Children grow faster than they should in orphanages, Hannibal knows it first-hand.

The director opens the door to the infirmary for Hannibal. It is spacious, with beds covers in soft linen lined up along the wall and curtains between them. All of them are empty save one, occupied by a boy with dark curls who is staring outside the window while leaning against several pillows. Hannibal lightly coughs to let him know that he has company, which causes the form to jump slightly before slowly turning his head around.

“William, this is Dr. Lecter, who is the benefactor of this house.” Says the director.

The boy makes an effort to sit up straighter, but his face scrunches up in pain. Hannibal waves his hand to tell him that there’s no need. He takes note of the boy’s pale skin, his lips slightly tinged blue while his cheeks are pink from a slight fever. Hannibal frowns – children are often sick, he is aware, but it seems to be something more serious than the flu.

“What ails you, William?” he makes an effort to speak softly, gently.

William coughs, a dry one that seems to rattle his chest. His voice is hoarse when he answers.

“The nurse said it’s probably pneumonia, Dr. Lecter, sir. I’ve been here for a couple weeks now.”

Hannibal frowns. Why hasn’t the nurse asked for a proper doctor’s visit? It pains him to see a sweet boy like him, lying as if he’s in his death bed, when he should be frolicking and

learning. He approaches the bed, and sees how William tenses up but stays still, his eyes never leaving Hannibal.

“William, would you let me take a look? I’m a medical doctor.”

The boy relaxes, and pulls down the covers, exposing his torso. The hospital gown hangs loosely on his shoulders, and Hannibal guesses him to be around 10. Too young to have lost his parents and be ill; Hannibal laments how the world punishes those who certainly do not deserve such cruelty. He orders the boy to take some long breathes for him, holding his hand firmly against his chest. It is indeed grave, and he decides that he must ask the nurse about him.

Hannibal rearranges the covers for him and straightens the pillows, helping the boy lie down again. Will lets out a soft sigh as he settles. As his hands linger around the edge of the bed, Hannibal once again gaze upon his face, and realizes that for the first time in a long time, he actually /cares/ for someone. His wish for William’s health is not a polite, perfunctory emotion, but very genuine.

“Thank you for letting me see to you, William. I wish you a speedy recovery.”

“Thank you, sir. And please, call me Will.”, answers Will, already struggling to keep his eyes open. Hannibal smiles and draws the curtains around his bed.

When Hannibal asks the nurse about the boy, he soon understands why no doctor has been called; the boy is too weak to survive pneumonia. His medical knowledge supports this – he agrees with the decision, rationally – and yet he feels anger, sadness, grief for a life that has not yet passed. He vows to do whatever he can to save Will. He has failed once, with Mischa; he will not let the world take away yet another child who is under his care.

An Unexpected Companion

Chapter Summary

Hannibal takes care of Will and unexpectedly builds camaraderie with a figure in Will's life.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After seeing Will in the orphanage, Hannibal can't stop thinking about him. The thought of the sickly pale boy, lying awake in bed while coughing into the night, pulls at Hannibal's heart in a way that hasn't for a long time.

He soon stops holding weekly dinner parties, stating the reason as the orphanage taking up more of his time to his disappointed acquaintances in high Baltimore society. Every Friday night, after his last appointment finishes in early afternoon, he quickly returns to his house. He prepares a warm meal, softly scrambled eggs and oats porridge, alongside a small serving of high-grade honey to make some tea once he gets there. Packing a thermos of coffee for himself to drink on the drive,he places everything neatly in a canvas bag thick enough to retain warmth before getting into his Bentley.

The director of the orphanage is a bit nervous, not yet used to seeing Dr.Lecter visit so often. He is relieved when he realizes that the benefactor is solely visiting to look at the sick child, and greets Hannibal at the front gate of the orphanage to give him updates on Will's health as they walk the short distance to the building. Hannibal attentively listens to every detail, slightly smiling when he hears that Will has been doing better in the days and frowning when he hears about Will's nightmares.

"Good evening, Will. I hope you're feeling better."

Will is reclining on the pillows as always, his blankets already drawn over his form. It's almost been a month since Hannibal's first visit, making this his fourth. While he still looks tired, he's also comparably doing better. Will clears his throat a couple times before replying in his soft voice:

"Good evening, Dr. Lecter. Thank you for coming to see me."

Hannibal suppresses a sigh. Will seems to not understand that Hannibal would keep on visiting him, because Hannibal can see how Will's face brightens as he notices the older man entering the infirmary, full of child-like wonder and surprise. He vows to keep on returning often enough that Will would expect his visit as routine.

He takes the packets out of his bag, calling for the nurse to bring him a teapot and cup of hot water. Soon, a small overbed table is set with thermos and airtight containers, and Hannibal helps tuck in a napkin around his neck to prevent any spills.

While Will slowly eats and Hannibal stirs the honey into the warm water, they talk about everything - Will talks about how he can see the weather becoming colder, the tree in his view through the window losing its leaves. Hannibal asks if he's cold in the mornings, and Will shakes his head, patting his soft blankets. Hannibal talks about funny anecdotes concerning his patients - and he smiles when he succeeds in making Will chuckle from a story about a man who cried so much that he had overstayed his appointment and Hannibal had to escort him out while he was sniffling. He's yet to hear a true laugh from the boy, but he's determined.

After half an hour, Will is finished with his dinner. Hannibal clears the containers away, untucking the napkin and holding the porcelain cup up to Will's lips as he sips the last drops of the tea. Intentionally keeping his voice light, he asks Will:

"I heard you're having nightmares, Will. Can you tell me about them?"

The small smile that graced Will's smile throughout dinner disappears in a blink of an eye. Will shuts his eyes, reminded of his night terrors, how he's terrified when he wakes up coughing and his blankets tangled around his legs, calming himself by staring up at the tall ceiling as the nurse fusses over him.

His eyes open in surprise as he feels a warm hand around his own, gently rubbing warmth into his pale fingers. He tries to swallow around his sore throat.

"You don't have to, if it's too painful. I apologize for the intrusion."

"No, it's okay, sir. I just find it difficult to talk about… I haven't told anyone about it yet. But I guess talking about it can help." Will offers him a weak smile, and Hannibal pats his hand in consolation and encouragement.

"The nightmares… Well, they always starts with the smoke."

Hannibal remembers reading a brief file on William Graham on his first visit. It didn't have a lot of information; Will was living with his father in Virginia before his house burned down in the middle of the night, about three months ago. The damage from the smoke and fire probably damaged Will's lungs, making him susceptible to severe pneumonia.

"I keep coughing and breathing it in, and I hear Winston - Winston's my dog- he's scratching on my door and my dad is shouting at me to get out, but I can't move - like I'm tied to my bed. And then… I can move, but the house is on fire, and I can't find the door, and …"

Will's hyperventilating, his breath getting shorter and he's gulping in air, as if he's back in that burning house. Hannibal smoothes Will's sweaty curls away from his forehead, pulling the blankets down so that Will feels the cool air and realizes that he's safe.

“Will, breathe with me. It’s okay, you’re safe now, you’re in Baltimore.” Hannibal stands up from the chair beside Will’s bed, pulling Will’s body forward until he slumps against Hannibal’s strong shoulders, his shirt drenched through. He must request the nurse to change it before he goes to sleep.

“Thank you, sir. I’m sorry, I know I should be getting better.” Will whispers into Hannibal’s ear, and Hannibal gives him a gentle squeeze around his torso, shushing him. Yes, Will must get better, but it’s not his fault being sick. He carefully helps Will lie down again, unwrapping his arms around the frail boy.

Will breaks the silence first. “I miss Winston so much. He used to sleep with me in the cold winter to keep warm. I worry about him, it’s so cold now and I don’t know where he is.” Will glances at Hannibal, before he smiles and asks “Dr. Lecter, I don’t think you do, but do you have any dogs?”

Hannibal has to think for a moment until he realizes that Winston is the name of Will’s dog. He has automatically assumed that the dog didn’t make it out of the fire, but Will’s worry suggests otherwise.

“No dogs, I’m afraid. But Winston seems like a loyal dog, can you tell me more about him?”

Hannibal coaxes the story out of Will, and he learns about the blank period of missing information , starting from the accident to the day social services sent Will to Hannibal’s orphanage.

Will was sent to his extended family that lives near Baltimore, but they didn’t really want him there. One day, he found that they abandoned Winston someplace away from their house, since he was making a mess and feeding one mouth was enough as it was.

Will cried until he was certain that Winston couldn’t make it back to him in the unfamiliar neighborhood, then ran away to find the dog himself. In the end, he was found by a woman who worked at social services, feverish and homeless - and was sent to Hannibal’s orphanage.

Hannibal is furious as he listens to Will’s small voice recount the cold nights spent under bridges and cold meals that came from stealing food from stores. No wonder Will is in a bad shape - if Will was found just a week later, Hannibal estimates that even he would have given up.

“Dr. Lecter, I’m sorry if I made you angry. I’m very grateful that I’m here now, thank you for taking care of me.”

Hannibal realizes that he has gripped Will’s hand so tightly in his wrath that he left red marks on his skin. Chagrined, he rubs at the marks as he apologizes to Will, telling him that he’s not mad, and that he’s glad Will’s here, too.

For the rest of the evening, Hannibal tries to distract Will from his sorrow by asking him more about Winston. He memorizes every detail of how Winston looks, his tail being so

much whiter than the rest of his brown fur coat , his ears flopping when he runs through the yard and his mouth opening into a smile when he pants. He can picture this dog in his mind's eye just from Will's detailed descriptions. And although he isn't very fond of dogs, he feels a sense of camaraderie with Winston in that they both want to keep Will warm and safe.

When Hannibal notices Will's speech slowing, he motions for the nurse who has appeared by the door of the infirmary. As he picks up the canvas bag that's considerably lighter, he holds Will's hands and makes a promise that he'll return next week. Will gives him a small smile, and Hannibal leaves the room as the nurse helps Will take off his shirt and change into a new one.

That night, he puts away the containers, which stay unused until next Friday. Then he picks up a pencil and a scalpel.

Next week, Hannibal is late by a couple minutes. The director is taken aback by his unexpected companion, but he allows their entry into the building. As he turns the corner and comes into Will's view, he can already feel himself grinning, mirroring Will's delighted expression as he spies the two figures entering the infirmary.

After some scratching sounds, displeased comments from the nurse, and Hanibal's grunts, Will's face is soon buried in the scraggly brown fur as Winston happily licks away at Will's ears and arms. Hannibal sets the dinner bag aside as he sits down in his usual seat.

"Sorry for the delay, Will. Winston needed some convincing to get into the car, which wasn't a problem I expected."

"Thank you, sir, thank you so much! How did you find him?" Will's eyes are shining, while his hands still roam across the dog's coat.

Hannibal tells Will how he visited all the dog pounds in the vicinity, carrying a sketch he drew himself - he shows it to Will, who holds it reverently in his hands . Winston is well-mannered enough to know that paper isn't edible, which Hannibal appreciates. He had to give Winston a proper bath and feed him, and when he tells Will how Winston chewed one of his silk slippers in the study, Will laughs, a watery sound - and Hannibal decides that he's willing to sacrifice all the slippers in the world if it means he can hear that sound again.

After Will calms down from his excitement, Hannibal lowers Winston to the tiled floor and sets the overbed table for Will's supper. Winston quietly sits through their dinner, and Hannibal plucks a sausage from the egg scramble and feeds him for being a good boy. Winston rubs his head against Hannibal's palm as if he's asking more, or if he's asking for permission to get on the bed again, but neither wish is granted.

In the end, Hannibal asks the director to take care of Winston in the orphanage. His lifestyle with his office hours isn't suitable is the reason he readily gives, but in truth he doesn't have the heart to take the dog away from the boy, who looks like he finally has a will to live again. Maybe if Will sees Winston running around in the courtyard from his window, it'll motivate him to get better soon.

When he returns home, after clearing the containers for next week, he makes a note that he must order lint removers for all the fur that's over his house, his clothes and his car.

That night, Will sleeps soundly, his shirt and blankets equally covered with Winston's fur just like Hannibal.

Chapter End Notes

If you liked this, come say hi on twitter! @dinoleestuff

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!